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ABSTRACT

The Elderhostel program has provided many older persons with a stimulating learning experience at colleges throughout the United States and 46 other countries since its beginning in 1975. Participants in Elderhostel--who usually are retired, are more likely to be women than men, and range in age from 60 to the mid-90s--study topics of interest to them at a college for 1 or 2 weeks. Ball State University in Indiana conducts an Elderhostel program that has been very successful, as evidenced by the number of participants who return every year, as well as by the enthusiasm of the participants. Ball State's program includes lodging and food, classes taught by enthusiastic instructors, tours of campus and area landmarks, a wine-and-cheese reception in a campus mansion, use of all facilities, evening theater and concerts, and a graduation dinner and evaluation brunch. The complete package costs about $280 per participant. The Ball State program, as do other Elderhostel programs, fill older persons' needs for socialization, skill upgrading, intellectual stimulation, and new experiences. (KC)

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NO MOUNTAINS... NOR SEASHORE... JUST HOOSIER HOSPITALITY: AN ELDERHOSTEL CASE STUDY AT BALL STATE UNIVERSITY

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Experience College Without the Stress . . . The desire to learn and explore new ideas and experiences does not have to stop with retirement.

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW:

Elderhostel provides older Americans with opportunities for intellectual challenges, stimulating interactive fellowship and physical and cultural activities. Elderhostel is for older citizens "on the move"-- those who want to reach out for new experiences. Elderhostel welcomes persons sixty years of age (or older) and those whose spouses or companions are over 50 for a one week stay at a college campus. Elderhostelers live on campus and attend classes provided by the host school. "Its a concentrated dose of what it's like to be a college student -- without grades or homework" (Beck et. al., 1991, p. 63).

For most of the quarter-million seniors learners who attend Elderhostels around the world, the experience is more than just a pleasant and relatively inexpensive vacation. The classes range from leisure activities to more serious scholarly seminars.

> Elderhostels are educational, low-cost programs for older adults in which participants explore music, art, history, politics, nature, foreign language, hobbies, crafts and other topics.
> (Chicago Tribune 12/29/91 p.3)

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Most Elderhostel programs include three full non-credit college courses that meet for five days. Each course usually meets for approximately 90 minutes a day. This format allows the older adult learner to travel and to participate in other Elderhostel Programs across the country. There is a maximum of 50 students allowed for enrollment purposes, and a minimum of 21 participants are needed for the program to run successfully and the program budget to be cost effective. There are no grades, tests, or homework given during the courses, although, many Elderhostelers are quite serious students and utilize the library facilities for their independent studies and research.

In 1991, approximately 250,000 people attended Elderhostel programs sponsored by 1,800 colleges and traditional folks schools and independent institutions throughout the United States and 46 other countries. The Elderhostel course cataloges come out seasonally -- four times a year -- and two issues are devoted to Elderhostel foreign study and travel overseas.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES:

Inspired by the successful youth hostel program concept in Europe, the Elderhostel program began in 1975 as a non-profit educational organization at the University of New Hampshire with five colleges and 300 hundred hostelers. The program was started through the efforts of Martin Knowlton, a flamboyant and colorful social activist. Knowlton observed the successful operations of Youthostels in Europe, he decided to utilize college dormitories at the University of New Hampshire during the summer to provide classes for seniors with active minds.

Knowlton is often quoted as saying:

> The single most pervading need of older people in the United States was not food, clothing or shelter, but the need for a sense of significant self. Their lives must show significance. (Knowlton, 1977)

According to Knowlton, "The Elderhostel Program is a counter attack on the modern American myth of the 'used up elderly' and the idea that higher (older) age is a time to be endured with dignified sadness and resignation" (Kaplan, Change 1981, p. 38). The program originated as response to the growing number of adults over 65 in society seeking new opportunities for lifelong learning experiences.

PARTICIPATION AND MOTIVATION:

According to Kaplan, "Elderhostel participants come to the programs to learn. They are not goal-oriented persons who are trying to manipulate their learnings into something -- a degree, a job or a better salary. Motivation to participate in the program is the greatest difference for the hostelers" (Kaplan, Change, 1981 pp. 38-41).

In an article entitled: "Participation Motives and Learning Outcomes Among Older Learners" (Lifelong Learning , 1983) E. Michael Brady and Marv Lee Fowler discussed three major areas of motivation for participation among Elderhostelers. Cognitive interest, or the intellectual challenges provided by the program offerings was considered the primary motivator. The secondary motive according to Brady and Fowler, was goal orientation. Participants in Elderhostel programs were less receptive to the perception that age affects learning abilities.

The authors also found that most of the participants had previous educational backgrounds in the humanities and social sciences. And that the more education people have, the more they want. They tend to build on previous successful educational experiences (Brady and Fowler, 1983, p. 48).

According to Beck, Glick and Gordon, (1991), studies have indicated that continuing education is contagious: the more education people have, the more they want to continue their studies. Even further opportunities for extended learning will soon be needed. The first baby boomers will begin to retire by the end of this decade, and with longer life expectancy, many will have and additional 25 or more years in which to pursue their continuing studies (pp. 62-63).

Kaplan (1981) also had some important observations in regard to the Elderhostel programs and about the participants. "A major factor in the success of any educational program goes beyond the scholarly qualifications of the instructor; there must be an understanding of the elderly" (p. 40). At present, local higher educational institutions are free to decide what is to be offered in their Elderhostel programs, but Kaplan fears that the local and state governments will eventually get involved in the policy and program development decisions. He stresses that the fight against ageism should start with the aged providing direction for their lifelong learning experiences through Elderhostel programs. This would in turn influence others views in a more positive fashion (Kaplan, pp. 40-41). Many Elderhostel programs are currently offered on a year-round basis, and new programs need to be developed that will reach older adults who cannot leave their homes, perhaps

through distance education television and new uses of the media. Beck et al. (1991) support this view through their discussion: "Some seniors may one day attend classes via video and computer links - continuing to learn even from their hospital bed, savoring new fields that keep their minds young." (p. 63).

E. Michael Brady, (November, 1983) in his article "Personal Growth and the Elderhostel Experience", cites some major outcomes from education for the older adult learner from their attendance and participation in Elderhostel programs. Developing new and positive relationships was the first major outcome. Another focused on the social welfare or community training from which aging adults could benefit. Escape from boredom or the daily routine, and cognitive interest or pursuing knowledge for its own sake were additional positive outcomes from the program (p. 11). Brady's work was supported by the seminal adult education participation studies of Morstain and Smart (1974) who reported six primary outcomes of educational activity by adults: (1) social relationships (making new friends, meeting people of the opposite sex), (2) external expectations (carrying out the recommendations of some authority), (3) social welfare (prepare for service to the community), (4) professional advancement (achieve higher job status, keep up with competition) (5) escape / stimulation (relief from boredom, break from daily routine) and (6) cognitive interest (knowledge for its own sake, satisfying personal curiosity) (pp. 83-98).

Brady further stressed that there were twelve major themes or outcomes of studies done on Elderhostel programs. Several of the major themes addressed are

included. Elderhostel participants responded to the fact that the Elderhostel program was intellectually challanging and stimulating; and that the program broadened their views. Participants also expressed that experiencing a new culture or living in different environs was important. The social aspect was another important factor. The positive growth that Elderhostelers experienced because of the interactions with others from other parts of the country was a positive outcome. There was also found to be a need felt among these adults for keeping current and staying active. Brady points out, "That this reinforces the *Activity Theory* which is interpreted as the best way to be successful in old age is to keep as many of the roles and activities as possible that were a part of the middle years" (p. 12).

"One of the other important outcomes of the Elderhostel program was that it helped the participants learn and to become aware of new hobbies and activities. The program also gave the participants the determination to use and practice skills they had given up on" (pp. 11 - 13).

NATIONAL SCENE:

Today, the Elderhostel Program is headquartered as a non-profit organization on Federal Street in Boston, Massachusetts. The Elderhostel program is supported by a major network of about 1,800 colleges and universities and non-traditional folkschools and other educational institutions. The states in which colleges and university Elderhostel programs are coordinated and supported through a state director. The local college Elderhostel program are autonomously coordinated through a Continuing Education Office by a experienced director and advocate.

The statistics that profile the senior Elderhostel program participants are revealing. Seventy percent of the first-timers Elderhostelers become repeaters. Of hose who enroll, 85 percent are retired, and 30 percent have graduate degrees. Fifty percent are former teachers or professional people. Many couples attend, but the largest group are women who comprise about 64 percent of the Elderhostel enrollees at programs across the country. (National Elderhostel Statistics, 1990).

THE BALL STATE UNIVERSITY MODEL:

Ball State University, located in Muncie, Indiana, sociologically known as Middletown USA, and 58 miles northeast of Indianapolis, is a comprehensive, public assisted institution of higher education serving approximately 20,480 students whose mission is to provide excellent education. Ball State University offers more varied academic programs than the small liberal arts college while, at the same time, providing a more personalized educational experience than may be found at a large research-oriented university. Ball State University was founded as Indiana State Normal School, Eastern Division, in 1918 and later became known as Ball State Teachers College. The state institution was named in honor of the Ball Brothers Family who contributed to its financial success over the years. On February 8, 1965, the Indiana General Assembly renamed the institution, Ball State University. The university offers more than 140 major and minor areas of study through its six major colleges and offers master's degree programs in sixty-six fields of study, educational specialists degrees in four fields and doctoral degree programs in thirteen fields. (Ball State University Bulletin 65 (3) pp. 1-3)

The Ball State Elderhostel Program was started in 1977 through the efforts Gerontology Director Emeritus, H. Mason Atwood, who also served as the first statewide director of the Indiana program. Fourteen higher educational institutions and non-traditional centers offering senior learning programs comprise the Indiana State Elderhostel Institutional Network.

During the past nine years, the Ball State profile of Elderhostel participants has followed the national trends. The youngest Elderhostel participant was 61 and the oldest was 94, with the mean or average age about 71. Sixty-seven percent of the participants are women yet many couples do attend. The program has given many older adults a sense of purpose and renewed excitement after retirement. The common denominator is that the Elderhostelers like people and want to continue stretching themselves mentally and culturally. Often they stretch themselves physically, but not as former athletes -- just willing to have fun and participate in the social and sports activities (Murk, 1991 p. 23).

Ball State University, like many other Elderhostel programs nationally, offers special low-cost, short term, weekly residential educational programs at an average cost of $ 280 for each participant. This all inclusive fee covers modest yet nutritious meals and comfortable accommodations. The elderhostelers are housed on the first floor of residence halls (dormitories) so that they do not have to climb unnecessary stairs and to accommodate any handicapped participants. Separate bathroom facilities are on each wing of each floor. Hand towels, bed linens, and blankets are provided. Since sleeping accommodations at Ball State are not air

conditioned. it is suggested that hostelers bring a portable electric fan. The college classrooms, lounge, and dining facilities are air conditioned. Complete orientation packets, participants profiles, faculty and staff descriptions and course content are provided. Necessary maps and residence hall accommodations requirements are sent out beforehand.

At Ball State University, besides the classroom experience each year, there are daily trips and tours around the lovely 900 acre campus, included guided tours of the Bracken Library, Christy Woods and the famous Wheeler orchid collection, The Art Museum, Minnetrista Cultural Center, Solar Energy Lab, state of the art Telecommunications Facilities, and outstanding Wellness Center, and a visit to the glass jar museum at Ball Corporation. Transportation to these special sites and events are provided through the fourteen-passenger campus minivans or bus.

The BSU Alumni and Development Office underwrites a cheese and wine reception at the famous E.B. and Bertha Ball Mansion. Attendance is arranged for choral or summer theatre entertainment on campus in the evening, special evening lectures or entertainment and a special graduation dinner program at a Muncie restaurant completes the week's major activities. The program concludes with a Saturday morning brunch and formal evaluation process.

Elderhostelers choose their own courses based on regional location, campus settings, course offerings, being near to friends or family, or choose their courses based on a lifetime interest or curosity rather than an experiment in formal study.

Elderhostel participants bring into the classroom a kind of excitement, a

certain freshness, and curosity that is often lacking in formal education today. The faculty at Ball State love to teach the Elderhostel courses and often suggest titles and special interest courses for the program. They feel stimulated, often challenged by the senior learners. "They pay so close attention to what is being said by the instructor -- teaching Elderhostel was one of the highlights of my academic career," one Ball State instructor indicated.

The 1992 Ball State Elderhostel program included classroom subjects featuring Senior Theatre - and improvisations (no acting experience necessary), taught by Dr. Don Heady, theatre professor; Writing Family Histories and Special Memorable Events conducted by English professor and writing specialist, Dr. Rai Peterson; and Swimnastics: Aquarobics Class (This form of water exercise allows movement with less strain on muscles than floor exercise) - "The ability to swim is not necessary , but don't forget to bring your swimsuit", added Aquarobics Professor Mrs. Gwen Robbins.

The second week of classes featured a wonderful class entitled: Toward Human Excellence -- fifteen common human strivings form the foundation of psychology professor emeritus and world traveler, Ray Gale's special course. The Making of the Modern Short Story -- understanding viewpoint, characterization, dialogue, and plot, is taught by the humorous and delightful English professor Frances Mayhew Rippy. Participants are encouraged to bring or to write their own sketches or stories. The final course, The Genius of Italian Renaissance Architecture - architects who laid the foundations for modern design, is taught by

specialist, Gil Smith of the College of Architecture. This year, attendance averaged about 25 participants per session. Last year 51 attended the first week and 36 attended the second week. Throughout the program courses were offered in the classical tradition, that is, developing a sound mind, heart, and spirit -- classes that were intellectually stimulating, fun and exciting, and physical fitness activities.

"The Elderhostel Experience at Ball State was rated as one of the best, if not the best programs due to its excellent organization, dedicated staff, exciting program and challenging and fulfilling classes," according to a twenty-six Elderhostel program veteran. He continued: "You are never too old to learn," he said. "As long as your brain functions, you can learn." He and his wife have returned for to the Ball State University campus the past five years for Elderhostel Programs. "The reason, I tell others about the Muncie program is that, if you are in good hands with AllState Insurance, then you must be in better hands with Ball State."

In Indiana, fifteen sites throughout the state offer a variety of week long program schedules throughout the spring and summer months and into early autumn. Where else can senior participants get to study all those things they always wanted to learn, with professors who love teaching, with classmates who love learning and are excited about life and lifelong learning? Elderhostel is the way retirement is suppose to be.

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